

# Being apart, working together: the story of Guerlande



Guerlande and her daughters, Nadia and Farah.

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Guerlande is 22 years old and lives in Gwo Figè, Mable with her husband, Peterson, and two daughters, Nadia and Farah (five and three years old, respectively). Nadia is in the first year of primary school. Guerlande lives very close to her parents' house because she had received a parcel of land from her father to build her Chemen Lavi Miyò (CLM) house. Peterson does not own property yet. Guerlande and Peterson cultivate beans on the plots that belong to Peterson's parents where they have access to use.

Guerlande's first child is not from Peterson. The biological father does not contribute and

neglects Nadia's needs. Guerlande does not expect anything from him any more as Peterson takes care of both children.

## Participation in the CLM programme

Guerlande joined the CLM programme in the summer of 2017. She received a few livestock (two goats and a pig) from the programme. Initially, she had trouble completing the construction of her house because of the difficulty of sourcing the building material (see the [Challenges](#) section) and had a slow



Cows in the rice field.

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start in making progress in the CLM activities. The money earned from livestock sales is set aside for the benefit of the whole family. She plans to sell the pig, and with that money combined with other funds, she wants to buy a heifer. Once the heifer reproduces, she will sell the offspring and buy a farm plot. She will also drink milk from the cow. There is no local dairy market in this area, and customarily, people share and give milk to one another. Having access to fresh milk at home will contribute positively to the children's protein and fat consumption.

Guerlande is an active member of the community savings group that the CLM programme established in the village. After saving for over a year, she took out a loan in August to purchase beans for planting and trading. Since beans are a household staple and many families grow them for home consumption, the price of beans fluctuates with increasing demands between the harvest seasons. Having access to money when seeds are most expensive helps Guerlande to cope with a tight household budget.

Her husband Peterson works in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, as a seasonal farm labourer. Peterson goes to work in the Dominican Republic at the end of October and early November. The first time he worked there, he stayed for 15 days, and the second time, he worked for a month. This time, Peterson managed to stay and work for over a month. He earns up to ten times more working there than in Haiti.

## Positive or negative effects on her children

Before she joined, Guerlande used to spend much time outside the house. For example, she would visit her sister in Mache Kana and stay there for up to a month (this is before she met Peterson). She used to leave Nadia with her grandmother or a neighbour. Since she joined the programme, she stays home to take care of her children.

The CLM training and assets transfers have brought positive changes in Nadia and Farah's living environment which directly affects their health and nutritional needs. The cash and livestock transfers allow Guerlande to purchase more food to better nourish and care for them. The training in hygiene, water treatment, and early childhood development has notably reduced the incidence of food and waterborne diseases, but has also increased playful interactions between Guerlande and Nadia and Farah. Guerlande also helps Nadia with school lessons and homework. The most memorable events that Guerlande credit the CLM programme for is when she was able to pay for a birth certificate for Nadia and afford a baptism ceremony for Farah.

Guerlande's mother, Anne-Cécile, and Guerlande's two younger sisters (aged 13 and 11, who still live at their parents' home) are the main caretakers of Nadia and Farah when Guerlande and Peterson are working away. Guerlande shares the responsibility in taking care of



her younger sisters too. Her little sister can bathe the children and feed them with the food that Guerlande prepares for Nadia and Farah. However, her sister can only help after school and during the school break.

With the help of her family, Guerlande manages to work around the CLM activities and childcare duties. Guerlande usually starts work early in the morning to bring out the animals to feed and would not have enough time to prepare food for Nadia before she goes to school. Fortunately, Anne-Cécile usually cooks for the whole family, so there is always food for breakfast. Thanks to Anne-Cécile, Nadia does not leave the house with an empty stomach. Moreover, Guerlande's younger sisters help Nadia get ready for school. Also, when Peterson is at home, he takes care of the livestock. The extensive support from the family allows Guerlande to work in farming plots during this time and be back before Nadia returns from school to prepare a proper meal for her daughters.

However, maintaining a balanced and healthy diet is difficult because fresh produce is not always available and affordable. In addition, the long and arduous journey from the mountain top village of Gwo Figè to the nearest market in the valley is very exhausting. That is why the produce from the home garden and farm plots is essential for the household's food and nutrition security. As Peterson explains, 'We don't always [cook healthy meals] because sometimes we don't find [the

ingredients] here... and also we are in a place where it is not easy to find food with 100 gourdes'. Although the household diet composition has not changed since the CLM programme, the family cooks with a healthy diet in mind and eats more at regular times.

## Challenges

Initially, Guerlande faced multiple issues and delays with the house construction, mainly because of the difficulty of getting the building materials. Since Peterson does not own any land, he asked his father for permission to use some of the trees to build their new (CLM) house. Despite many attempts to convince him, Peterson's father never granted permission to use the trees. After much dispute, Peterson went to the local court to complain and appeal. The local authority permitted use. According to Guerlande, her father-in-law is seen as a problematic person and has caused many troubles with other members of the family too.

Other neighbours who were not part of the CLM programme were jealous of CLM members (in general, not of Guerlande personally). Another issue that arose after the CLM programme was that previously CLM members used to work as labourers for others in the village. Since the programme began, however, CLM members no longer go to work for others, and this seeming lack of labour and cooperation has caused tension amongst some villagers.



Guerlande's CLM house.

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On the way to school.

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## Hopes and aspirations for the future

Guerlande would like to continue to take good care of the animals, repair the house, and send her children to school for higher education.<sup>1</sup> Investing in the future of the children is one of the essential messages of the CLM programme that Guerlande feels especially committed to fulfilling:

*When I carry weights to go selling, I get a headache, it gives me a fever, my body hurts, my neck hurts, [and] my feet hurt because sometimes I have to climb the hill. When I sell I'm fine, I can buy a livestock and can pay the school for the child.*

However, the remoteness of the village forces the children to walk long distances and relocate to find quality education. Only primary-level education is available in Gwo Figè. Guerlande will send Nadia to

a secondary school in Lascahobas where Guerlande's brother and his wife live. Farah will go to preschool in Mirebalais (when she turns three) where Guerlande's brother-in-law lives. She hopes that Nadia and Farah will continue to study and work in jobs that will bring wealth and prosperity.

Guerlande also wants to start a trading business in Lascahobas. She will rent a place there. Even if she works there, she will continue to live in Gwo Figè and keep working on her farm plots during the farming season. She will only move to Lascahobas during the off-season to conduct her business. She would keep the house in Gwo Figè. Guerlande would encourage her children to pursue their career and life (having their own family) away from home, but she would stay in the village. She would go and visit Nadia and Farah if they chose to live elsewhere.

<sup>1</sup> The school levels in Haiti comprise (1) preschool, (2) primary (*primaire fondamentale*) for nine years, (3) secondary (*secondaire*) for four years, and (4) university.



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